

## Question and Answers: Offshore Pest Information Program

The Offshore Pest Information Program (OPIP) is a program run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Under the OPIP, APHIS systematically collects, reports, assesses, and communicates information about agricultural pests and diseases in other countries. Together, these efforts enhance U.S. preparedness and reduce the risk of introducing foreign agricultural pests and diseases into the United States.

### **Q. What is the OPIP?**

**A.** Under the OPIP, APHIS personnel and partners collect agricultural pest and disease information from strategic locations overseas. The information largely focuses on new pest and disease detections, distribution data, and developments in research. Personnel enter relevant information into the Offshore Pest Information System (OPIS), a database that serves as the main communication tool for OPIP. The database facilitates the generation and processing of reports and the distribution of information within APHIS and to partnering organizations and stakeholders. Through the OPIP, APHIS and its partners receive advanced notices of risks associated with specific commodities and pathways.

The OPIP strengthens U.S. safeguarding systems and expands overseas partnerships by distributing information worldwide that would otherwise only be available at a local level. With the OPIS database, APHIS is able to provide a timely response to pests and diseases that threaten U.S. animal and plant resources.

### **Q. Who collects information for OPIS? What information is reported?**

**A.** APHIS field personnel overseas are situated strategically to effectively and efficiently gather pest and disease information. Field personnel report relevant foreign pests and diseases that pose a threat to U.S. agriculture. They also work with foreign officials and researchers to collect, translate, and report pest and disease discoveries or outbreaks, changes in pest distribution, and significant research developments.

Personnel also monitor local and national media for relevant news and updates.

### **Q. How does OPIP support APHIS' mission to protect U.S. agriculture?**

**A.** OPIP is a collaborative effort developed by several APHIS programs: Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ), Veterinary Services (VS), and International Services (IS). The OPIP provides supplemental information to enhance ongoing agency animal and plant health campaigns.

By assessing risks and making changes to procedures or regulations before a pest or disease becomes established, decision makers can preempt undue disruptions to trade. In addition, early awareness of animal and plant health issues allows APHIS programs to prepare for threats from potential new pest and disease outbreaks in the United States.

APHIS officials, Federal partners, and other key stakeholders use OPIP information to develop strategies to prevent or reduce the risk of introducing foreign pests into the United States. These strategies include developing risk assessments to determine what measures need to be taken either at the country of origin or at our borders before importing specific commodities; identifying target pests for domestic or offshore pest surveys and U.S. border inspections; and working collaboratively with foreign countries in other strategic locations to identify emerging pests and disease situations that could potentially threaten U.S. agriculture.

### **Q. What resources for users are available through OPIS?**

**A.** OPIS users can view reports describing pest occurrences, pathways, countries and regions affected, population levels, background information, and current pest status. Reports are searchable by keyword. The OPIS database includes searchable pest and disease lists by country and by region, as well as pest and disease distribution maps.

OPIS subscribers receive weekly e-mail summaries with information and links to plant and animal reports of significant interest. Weekly summaries highlight OPIS reports that have triggered an alert to plant inspection stations or ports of entry, as well as reports that may require further action. The weekly summaries notify users of changes to the site and allow OPIS staff to communicate vital information to subscribers. For users' reference, OPIS maintains archives of previous versions of OPIS weekly summaries.

OPIS also features supplemental information for users. The pest news section includes translations of official reports, news articles, and other publications related to pests of concern. The links section connects users to external resources related to plant and animal health. The references tab provides users with additional Web sites, publications, and other plant and animal health-related resources.

**Q. Is there training available for new OPIS users?**

**A.** Two online courses are available to new users. OPIP 101 provides basic information about the program, while OPIS 101 teaches users about the OPIS online database. Users can access the training courses by logging on to the OPIS Web site (<https://secure.opis.info>) and selecting from the help drop-down list.

**Q. Where can I access OPIS?**

**A.** OPIS is a Web-based, secure interface managed by APHIS' international pest information coordinator. Access is available to APHIS employees and stakeholders. For more information about becoming a registered user, please e-mail [subscribe@opis.info](mailto:subscribe@opis.info). APHIS employees can self-subscribe to the system by going to <https://secure.opis.info/scripts/APHISregister1.cfm>. U.S. Customs and Border Protection employees can register at <https://secure.opis.info/scripts/DHSregister1.cfm>.

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